



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
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Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653
mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us

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1. Meeting Set to Discuss Proposed Twelve Mile Lake Improvements
2. DNR's Pfeiffer Wins National Wildlife Award [electronic photo available]
3. DNR Auction Set for May 7 at Iowa State Fairgrounds
4. Paddlefishing on the Mighty Mississippi – by Joe Wilkinson
5. Wood Ducks and Birds are Back – by Joe Wilkinson [hold until March 3]

MEETING SET TO DISCUSS PROPOSED TWELVE MILE LAKE IMPROVEMENTS

The Creston Water Works Board in cooperation with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will host a public information meeting concerning the proposed draw down and renovation of Twelve Mile Lake. The meeting is at 7 p.m., March 15, in the Congregate Meal Site at the restored railroad depot (City Hall), 116 West Adams, in Creston.

The purpose of the draw down is to allow the Creston Water Works to inspect the drinking water intake gates located in the lake, make any necessary intake repairs to insure proper operation and to stabilize the shoreline with rock. In conjunction with the draw down, the Iowa DNR will renovate the fish population, repair boat ramps and fishing jetties, and improve fish habitat in the lake.

The game fish population has been destroyed by an infestation of yellow bass resulting in a significant decline in the number of people using the lake for fishing. In addition, common carp in the lake create water quality problems for the water treatment plant. Eliminating these two species will help improve recreation and water quality in the Creston area.

For additional information, the public can contact Gary Sobotka (641-464-3108) Steve Green (641-782-5817) or the Southwest District Fisheries Office (712-769-2587).

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DNR'S PFEIFFER WINS NATIONAL WILDLIFE AWARD

Iowa bred wild turkeys are firmly established throughout the state--now. They also thrive across much of North America. For his role in restoring wild turkey populations, Don Pfeiffer, of Washington, has been honored with the National Wildlife Turkey Federation's Joe Kurz Wildlife Manager of the Year award.

Pfeiffer--southeast district wildlife supervisor for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources --received the award at the NWTF's annual convention, in February. "Don Pfeiffer has been a monumental force in assisting the trap and transfer efforts in Iowa," applauded Dr. James Earl Kennemer, NWTF senior vice president for conservation. "His hard work and leadership have restored turkey populations in Iowa and the future of the wild turkey hunting tradition."

Dale Garner, chief of the DNR's wildlife bureau said Pfeiffer's legacy is the successful return of the wild turkey to all counties of Iowa.

"Don has provided leadership and direction to more than 100 wildlife professionals who worked tirelessly over the last 18 years to trap, relocate and manage wild turkeys throughout Iowa," Garner said. "These efforts have opened doors to other wildlife restoration projects including river otters and prairie chickens."

The eastern wild turkey, native to Iowa, was extirpated from the state during European settlement in the 1800 to 1900s. Pfeiffer oversaw Iowa's recently completed turkey trapping program; through which 2,000 wild turkeys were live-trapped from areas with a surplus of birds and released throughout Iowa in suitable habitat with few or no birds.

More importantly, from a nationwide perspective, though, was relocation of 7,500 wild birds from Iowa to states ranging from Kentucky and Texas to Washington, as well as Ontario, Canada. Iowa was one of the key states in supplying those restoration birds. The program brought more than \$3.3 million dollars to Iowa for habitat enhancement and land purchases.

"Don has brought excitement to his job and the restoration efforts of the wild turkey in Iowa," said Todd Gosselink, Iowa DNR wild turkey project leader. "Without his coordination and work ethic, Iowa may not have the number of birds that it does today."

Pfeiffer serves on the NWTF Iowa Board of Directors, and is co-editor of the NWTF Iowa Newsletter.

For more information, contact Pfeiffer at 319-694-2430.

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DNR AUCTION SET FOR MAY 7 AT IOWA STATE FAIRGROUNDS

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will hold an auction at 9 a.m., May 7, in the cattle barn on the Iowa State Fairgrounds. Items for sale include old computers, boats, trailers, mowers, guns, bows and other items. Everything is sold as is with no guarantees or warranties.

In order to purchase a gun, the bidder will be required to submit one of the following permits: a valid Iowa permit to acquire pistols or revolvers, available from the local sheriff's department; a federal firearms license; or a professional or non-professional permit to carry concealed weapons.

Most items, except for the guns, will be available for viewing on May 5 and 6. The doors open at 8 a.m. May 7. Payment is due upon purchase and all sales are final. All items must be removed by the end of the auction.

For a sale bill, send a self-addressed, stamped, number 10 envelope to: DNR Auction, 502 E. 9th St., Des Moines, IA 50319, or send an e-mail to susan.davenport@dnr.state.ia.us.

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PADDLEFISHING ON THE MIGHTY MISSISSIPPI

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Bobbing in the waves, ice chunks and heavy current, we stayed at the task. With long, sweeping pulls, three of us dragged the 20-pound line through the deep tailwaters of the Mississippi River. Each line had triple treble-hooks attached, with a half-pound weight pulling them toward the bottom. Our exaggerated sweeps through the water were designed to intersect with an unsuspecting paddlefish.

We tried to stay optimistic, but the odds---and the water pouring through the lock and dam---were working against us. Crew 'captain' Denny Weiss was hard-pressed to spot any telltale blips on the fish locator. "The water's come up about, probably two foot in the last four to six days. There's a lot more current velocity," explained Weiss, from the Department of Natural Resources Bellevue fisheries station. "Those fish are normally in 60 to 90 foot of water this time of year. Today, we've got way too much current. It's disrupted their feeding patterns and got em scattered all over."

That made snagging these monsters of the deep even more of a ‘needle in a haystack’ venture. It’s hard enough as it is. Plankton feeders, these paddlefish don’t strike at lures or bait. They sift plankton out of the water. To hook one, we had to snag its heavy-duty hide, then slowly reel it up to the surface. On a good day, 10 or 20 or so would be snagged; Iowa’s contribution to MICRA--Mississippi Interstate Cooperation Resources Association--a 23 state research program, coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

We were not skunked, though. DNR fisheries technician Mark Winn did connect in about 75 feet of water in a spot where Weiss had been marking them in past trips. Slowly, Winn cranked his catch closer to the surface. As it broke water, we could see what the hold up was. With its large spoonbill, or rostrum, it was nearly as long as our boat was wide. We welcomed it on board with a scale, tape measure and an airport security type metal detector.

Tugging the scales at 26 pounds, it was the biggest one I’ve seen in my half-dozen years of once-a-winter snagging. The tape stretched over 50 inches, from tail fork to eye. The flat, spoon-shaped paddle would have increased it by more than a foot, but project specifications call for the more accurate eye-to-tail length, for comparing growth and age. A wave of the wand showed no telltale wire tag in the paddler’s snout, so Weiss injected one with a specially built ‘gun’ and the fish was quickly returned to the icy water.

If this fish is ever recaptured, that tiny tag will yield information critical to the MICRA study. “It’ll tell us whether that fish was, say, tagged at another location—maybe Muscatine or Clinton,” explained Weiss. “We’ve got fish tagged as far away as Prairie du Sac, up on the Wisconsin River. We can get an idea of movement; We’ll also learn how much that fish grew; from when he was tagged maybe three, four or five years ago.”

While studies on the Missouri River show paddlefish movement of 400 to 500 miles, migration is limited on the Upper Mississippi, due to the ‘gate’ effect of the lock and dam system.

MICRA also examines at the overall growth of paddlefish size and numbers. Now in it’s 10th year, Weiss sees some progress along the Iowa segment of the river. “Through the late 1990s, we essentially saw no reproduction, no young fish coming on in the fishery. In four of the last five years, though, we have seen pretty good reproduction. That is still a small piece of the puzzle. Paddlefish take years to reach maturity and spawn every two years; making reproduction a slow process.

Lower numbers and sizes meant a halt to commercial fishing of paddlefish. Recreational anglers are allowed just two per day. And while biologists are encouraged by a possible uptick in the research graphs, they still need to know more. “We will look back at high river water levels during spawning periods each year,” said Weiss. “We might learn what colder weather might do to (the spawn/hatch process); or sudden drops in water levels, that could leave eggs stranded.”

The back-bending pursuit of these gaping-mouth uglies is important, not just for the species itself, but the overall health of the river ecosystem. “They’re a real unique fish,” conceded Weiss. “They have been around for 200-300 million years. Now, we have states cooperating to learn more about them and their movement.”

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[Hold this column until March 3]

WOOD DUCKS AND BIRDS ARE BACK

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Have ladder, will travel. With six-foot stepladder, wooden boxes and accompanying hardware, Jim Meier and Joe Bowman set out across the frozen marsh. Dry for the most part, a stop log structure in the earth dam showed where it could easily be flooded, when the rains come this spring. When it does, water over this ten-acre area will push water about three feet up the steel poles pounded into place on the Hawkeye Wildlife Area, in Johnson County. And that will suit the wood ducks just fine.

The pair, from the Department of Natural Resources wildlife crew on the area, was wrapping up the annual maintenance on wood duck boxes, in anticipation of the first migrating arrivals this month. “We usually start seeing wood ducks by the second week of March,” forecasts Meier. “Usually, a hen will use a box and then come back every year. Her offspring come back, too. You find more competition for the nest boxes, so we like to add more; maybe move some around.”

The wooden boxes function as artificial nests; replacing tree cavities lost over the last century. Wood ducks, natives in Iowa’s lowland timbers, virtually disappeared as flooding, agricultural development and other human factors drove them away. Nest box projects by private and government conservationists, though, have turned the tide. Wood ducks now are the second or third most common duck harvested by Iowa hunters; proof that they are—hopefully—here to stay.

Meier has 200 nest boxes up on the Hawkeye Area: about 100 more on other wildlife areas in the unit’s five eastern Iowa counties. “We are getting about 44 percent use; success rates,” he said, noting it was down from 50 percent a few years ago. That indicates the ducks might be getting a little crowded in places. With nine or 10 boxes mounted on poles, in this area, the ‘no vacancy’ sign will probably go up this spring. “Unless we plant some trees; isolate it a little bit more, we are probably at capacity here,” acknowledged Meier. “We may move up the creek a little, put some more nest boxes up that way.”

Meanwhile, maintenance and predator guards help keep occupancy rates steady. By placing the nests over water, much of the predation—from raccoons and other critters—is stymied. Cone-shaped shields or oversized PVC pipe below the nests also turn back

intruders. With all the work that goes into maintaining this wildlife housing project, he wants to ensure the occupants avoid home-wreckers during the critical nesting season.

Eagle Numbers Mount Over Thawing Iowa Waters

It was hard to tell where the swirling, blowing snow ended and the clouds of hungry gulls took over Monday, over the Coralville Reservoir west of Solon. As I watched the late blast of winter fighting off the early sign of spring, though, it was easy to pick a winner in the crowded sky. It was the eagles.

A few—stopping off for awhile on their way back north--floated over me at tree top level. Others hung over the thawing bay, dropping to snatch fish from the top water. Across the shallows, eight more perched in a tree. They were just a prelude, though, to 20 lining the edge of the ice on the main reservoir. More soared in and out of the late afternoon picture. Just five years ago, it would have taken a bitter cold, ice-locked morning below a Mississippi River lock and dam to concentrate that many eagles in one place; continued evidence of the raptor's remarkable comeback.

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